

Archiving at Lalitpur District Court

In a country where corruption and inefficiency are endemic, you start with the basics. In the Lalitpur District Court in Kathmandu valley of Nepal, over 50,000 files, some of them more than 100 years old, overwhelmed the small room in which they were stored.



Many of the files were in very bad shape with missing or damaged file documents, faded ink or indelible writing. Case files were held together with string and multiple case files stuffed in cotton sacks and usually left off the floor. The archive did not have a fire extinguisher, smoke detectors or staff procedures in the event of a fire.

As often as not, court staff used this chaos to obligate citizens to make “small contributions” in order to find their files. Even then, simply locating and retrieving a file was problematic and solely dependent on court staff’s personal memory.. In order to introduce some measure of rule of law and root out one cause of corruption and court delays, USAID funded a project providing on-the-job training in archiving and document retrieval. Toiling weekdays, holidays and before and after court hours, the training was completed in 801 man days. 28,000 case files were repaired, boxed and shelved. 2,000 files of supporting documents were returned to the government agencies from which they were borrowed. 33% of the archived files, those over 12 years old, were destroyed.

With files boxed and neatly stored on metal shelves, the court’s activities are significantly more organized and efficient. An automated file retrieval system has been installed and the staff is entering the data. Lalitpur District Court’s archives are now an example for courts throughout the country and other courts are making efforts to replicate.